

SERMON: *“Is not this Joseph’s son?”*

Rev. Geoff Ross, Sunday, January 30, 2022, St. Andrew’s Presbyterian Church

[Yesterday:F22/W1! 1st C reading:Out of love for love!]

As Susan just said, today we’re picking up where we left off last week, with the second half of Luke’s account of Jesus’ ‘sermon’ in the synagogue in Nazareth. And, to put it into context: this is basically a pulpit supply/guest preacher scenario where two things are happening at the same time. First, we have the congregation is eagerly/expectantly waiting to hear good things from their ‘home-town’ boy who is now making a name for himself – and, hopefully/maybe, get some extra-benefits from *“knowing Jesus when....”* Their expectations are to be complimented/stroked/thanked/looked after – after all, isn’t this Joseph’s son?

The other thing going on is less fawning/toadying/flattering and that is the concerns of the regular minister/Rabbi/preacher – or whoever believes that it’s their role to make sure that everything is correct/done by the rules/law/is orthodox – that things stay the way they’ve always been. Whoever that person is, they’re usually can be found sitting off to the side, nervously sweating/praying – but they’re not for the guest preacher/speaker; they’re praying that nothing gets said that will challenge/upset/offend the ‘way things are’/status-quo. You see; a guest preacher/speakers job is to do a different set of things: first, they’re to leave the regulars grateful for their regular minister/Rabbi/preacher; second, they’re not to stray off script/cause trouble/stir pots/set any fires....

Where we ended off last week things were going as well: Jesus was getting appreciative nods/murmurs, all eyes *“in the synagogue were fixed on him;”* they even *“spoke well of him and were amazed”* to the point that they marveled that, *“Is not this Joseph’s son?”* But, after initially approving of what Jesus said, the guest preacher’s *“gracious words”* turned/became edgy/challenging. Instead of it being what those listening expected – praise/recognition/accolades/approval – Jesus’ follow-up comments cut quickly, revealing how self-centred/serving/absorbed, hypocritical/false their expectations/faith/worship had become. Jesus’s words not only caused trouble/stirred pots/they ignited the whole congregation into such a spontaneous inferno of rage that they grabbed/took Him to the highest point on land so they could throw Him off the cliff to His death. But what exactly did He say?

There’s a saying – “God is in the details”(also “devil” – apparently interchangeable) – and God is indeed in the details! Ever present/omni-present/always in the details – and this is Good News for us/you/me because – we are the details! Jesus’ pronouncement that God’s promise found in Isaiah has been fulfilled painted the

broad brush-strokes, it was His follow-up connection of it to God's preferential treatment of the unknown 'widow' by Elijah, and the healing of the Syrian, Naaman of his leprosy by Elisha. Both were outsiders/less-than/unclean/non-believers in the eyes of faithful Jews, yet God tasked His greatest prophets to reveal to them God's power. What Jesus is telling His listeners is that the mission statement of God's Son/Messiah/Servant isn't about the comfortable/complacent pew-sitter/insider and their ego; it's about those left outside/out-there/forgotten/excluded/ignored because they didn't 'fit' inside/into our plans. Just as God worked in/through Isaiah/Elijah/Elisha, Jesus was saying that God was here/now/today in/through Him to again "do a new thing" to upend/upset the status-quo.

This Good News is also jarring:It's no wonder they/we got/get angry. First, it's not what they were used to/the story/narrative/they expected to hear – especially from one of their own/the Son of God! This is why they turn on Him/question His authority/loyalty, and threaten to kill Him. This episode reveals the gulf between our expectations of God and God's expectations for us. God will not be contained/confined to/by our expectations/concerns/desires/fears. God shows up – disrupts our safe/sanitized complacency/comfort – and declares that He is on the move, and that we can follow and be a part of this 'new thing' with/for/on the edge people/places – just like God did through others for us/me/you! Jesus is clear that this is His/God's plan/purpose – and that it will happen with/without us – but that it is also for us/and it has a cost/risk because letting go of our expectations/letting God's call/claim on our lives lead/guide us is hard/scary/frightening. But this is where Paul's well-known passage about love from 1st Corinthians comes in.

Read again, Jesus' reading from Isaiah, and His actions/interpretation of God's saving work in/through Elijah/Elisha speak directly to Paul's understanding of love as it serves/facilitates the building up/functioning of community. For Luke's Jesus, God's love isn't about just us – it's about justice for all! This inclusive love includes those on the outside looking in – because inclusion means we have to let them in/include them in all that we say/do as God's/Christ's Body in the world! If we don't say/do what we say/do in a Spirit of love, then all we say/do will fall/die with us:without love we are nothing. This/God's love is not about gaining everything, it's about giving everything away. And, as God did with Jeramiah/Jesus did with those listening to Him, out of love/for love God/Jesus disrupts our expectations to call us to a new life as an agent of God's love in/to the world. This love is not a means to an end – but it is the beginning and end of what God/Jesus expects of us. Amen.